

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L NAIROBI 5128

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: PEPB, AS, UG, KE

SUBJECT: AUSTRALIAN REPORTER'S COMMENTS ON UGANDA

1. HUGH DUNN, THE AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER, INVITED DCM TO JOIN HIM IN DEBRIEFING OF AUSTRALIAN REPORTER BILL DOWSETT IMMEDIATELY UPON LATTER'S RETURN FROM UGANDA, WHERE HE SPENT SOME TEN DAYS AND INTERVIEWED IDI AMIN. THE FOLLOWING ARE DOWSETT'S IMPRESSIONS.

2. RECEPTIVITY TO THE FOREIGN PRESS: DOWSETT SAID HE WAS GIVEN OUTSTANDING VIP TREATMENT. HE HAD A MERCEDES AT HIS COMMAND AT ALL TIMES IN HIS TRAVELS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY AND WAS INVARIABLY LODGED IN THE BEST ROOM OR SUITE AT THE HOTELS WHERE HE STAYED. HE WAS ALLOWED TO TRAVEL FREELY ABOUT THE COUNTRY AND SEE ALL THERE WAS TO SEE. ON THE OTHER HAND, HE WAS ONCE ARRESTED FOR
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PHOTOGRAPHING A HYDROELECTRIC PLANT AND ONLY OBTAINED HIS RELEASE SOME HOURS LATER THROUGH THE INTERVENTION OF HIGH MILITARY AUTHORITIES.

3. STATE OF THE COUNTRY: DOWSETT'S IMPRESSIONS WERE SIMILAR TO THOSE OF OTHER RECENT TRAVELERS. THERE IS NO OBVIOUS REPRESSION; SOME CONSUMER GOODS ARE COMING BACK INTO THE SHOPS; THE POPULATION

SEEMS TO BE BEARING UP UNDER THE AMIN REGIME REASONABLY WELL. ON THE NEGATIVE SIDE, ONE OF THE MOST STRIKING ASPECTS OF THE UGANDAN SCENE IS THAT EVERYTHING TECHNICAL IS RUNNING DOWN. EVERYTHING FROM ELEVATORS TO INDUSTRIAL MACHINERY TO POWER PLANTS AND FARM EQUIPMENT IS SIMPLY NOT WORKING THESE DAYS DUE TO THE LACK OF SPARE PARTS AND COMPETENT MAINTENANCE PERSONNEL. MOST OF THE CAPABLE UGANDANS HAVE FLED THE COUNTRY, AND UGANDA'S TERRIBLE HUMAN RIGHTS REPUTATION HAS MADE IT DIFFICULT TO RECRUIT SUFFICIENT EXPATRIATE PERSONNEL.

4. ON RELATIONS WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD: THROUGHOUT HIS VISIT, DOWSETT WAS CONSTANTLY IMPRESSED BY THE OBVIOUS UGANDAN DESIRE TO MEND ITS FENCES WITH WESTERN EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES. HIS INTERLOCUTORS STRESSED UGANDA'S NEED FOR TECHNICAL EQUIPMENT AND EXPATRIATE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE. DOWSETT THINKS THE DESIRE FOR RECONCILIATION, STIMULATED BY ECONOMIC NECESSITY, IS GENUINE. TECHNICALLY, THE UGANDANS ARE ABOUT AT THE END OF THE ROAD AND RECOGNIZE THEY NEED HELP AVAILABLE ONLY FROM THE INDUSTRIALIZED DEMOCRACIES. UGANDAN FRIENDSHIP WITH THE SOVIETS SEEMS TO HAVE NOT PAID OFF IN THIS FIELD.

5. BOB ASTLES: DOWSETT SPENT HE ESTIMATES SOME 12 HOURS WITH ASTLES DURING HIS VISIT. HE FOUND ASTLES "NOT STUPID BUT AN UNBALANCED, MANIC PERSONALITY." DOWSETT SAID ASTLES' ADMIRATION FOR AMIN WAS GENUINE AND COULD ONLY BE DESCRIBED AS ADULATION. AT ONE POINT ASTLES DECLARED "I WORSHIP THE MAN," AND DOWSETT
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BELIEVES HE TOLD THE TRUTH. IN OTHER RESPECTS, ASTLES' DEVOTION TO TRUTH WAS NOT SO APPARENT. HE CHANGED HIS STORIES OFTEN, BUT GAVE EACH VERSION WITH THE SAME ENTHUSIASTIC CONVICTION.

6. RESPONSIBILITY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS: ASTLES ADMITTED THAT ARCHBISHOP LUWUM, MRS. BLOCH, AND MANY OTHERS, HAD, IN FACT, BEEN MURDERED. BUT HE ARGUED THAT THE PRESIDENT WAS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THESE ACTS, WHICH WERE CARRIED OUT WITHOUT AUTHORIZATION BY SUBORDINATES OR OTHERS. ASTLES SUGGESTED THAT MRS. BLOCH MAY HAVE BEEN MURDERED BY THE RELATIVES OF THE UGANDAN SOLDIERS KILLED AT THE ENTEBBE AIRPORT BY THE ISRAELI ATTACKING FORCE.

7. THREAT TO AMIN GOVERNMENT: NONE APPARENT, ALTHOUGH ASTLES DID INDICATE SOME UNEASINESS WHEN DISCUSSING VICE PRESIDENT MUSTAFA ADRISI.

8. INTERVIEW WITH AMIN: IN HIS DISCUSSIONS WITH ASTLES AND OTHER SENIOR UGANDANS, DOWSETT HAD ASKED THAT HE BE PERMITTED TO POSE QUESTIONS FREELY, EVEN THOSE THAT MIGHT BE EMBARRASSING TO THE PRESIDENT. DOWSETT ARGUED THAT, IF UGANDA WERE TRULY INTERESTED IN LAYING THE PAST TO REST AND BEGINNING ANEW, ONLY SUCH A CLEAN BREAST OF THINGS WOULD SATISFY WORLD

PUBLIC OPINION. DOWSETT SAID ASTLES AND HIS OTHER INTERLOCUTORS AGREED TO THIS, BUT, ON THE NIGHT BEFORE HIS INTERVIEW, THE STATE COUNCIL MET AND VETOED THE IDEA. CONSEQUENTLY, HE WAS PERMITTED TO ASK ONLY THE MOST ANODYNE QUESTIONS, AND HE FEARED THAT HIS STORIES MIGHT, THEREFORE, SOUND LIKE A WHITEWASH OF THE AMIN REGIME.

9. DOWSETT GAVE THE IMPRESSION OF BEING AN INTELLIGENT, OBSERVANT YOUNG MAN, WHOSE IMPRESSIONS WE WOULD GUESS ARE GENERALLY VALID.
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